

Review Essay Series

THE AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL HISTORY OF KANSAS

R. Douglas Hurt

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Surely it is unnecessary to remind *Kansas History* readers of the importance of agriculture to the history of the state. Kansas was opened to Euro-American settlement 150 years ago, when the economic development of the United States and the creation of new farms in the West still were inextricably linked; and, although towns were part of this late nineteenth-century settlement process, the vast majority of Kansas's 1.5 million denizens was rural and tied to the farm economy. And agriculture and agribusiness remained vital sectors in the overall economy despite the twentieth-century revolution in farm technology and rural life. Not surprisingly, in light of the vast political, social, technological, and environmental developments of the last century and a half, "the agricultural and rural history of Kansas that historians, economists, sociologists, and political scientists, among others, have written is complex and far ranging."

So, it is appropriate that the journal's review essay series resumes after a brief hiatus with this important contribution by one of

Kansas has been important to American agriculture since the territorial period. During the late nineteenth century federal land policy, immigration, and technological change influenced settlement patterns, farm productivity, and agrarian politics. By the turn of the twentieth century the farm men and women in Kansas had earned a reputation as producers of wheat, corn, and cattle. Moreover, they were a people who often did not keep to themselves on isolated farms on the prairie and plains but who noisily, angrily, and occasionally successfully challenged corporate America to gain equitable treatment in the market place. Usually they defined economic problems in political terms. During the twentieth century agricultural politics dominated the lives of farm men and women while technological change, the dissolution of rural communities, and environmental regulations also became major concerns. As a result, the agricultural and rural history of Kansas that historians, economists, sociologists, and political scientists, among others, have written is complex and far ranging.

In general, however, prior to the 1960s the agricultural historiography of Kansas emphasizes economic and political change, broadly construed. During the 1970s historians became more concerned with social history, but much of this new scholarship still had an economic basis. Even so, while traditional economic and political studies continued to be published, particularly as article literature, social history that emphasized gender, families, and rural communities as well as ethnicity, immigration, and race became increasingly important for understanding the agricultural and rural history of Kansas. With the emergence during the 1970s of the new rural social history as a subfield of American history, the historio-

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Kansas has played a major role in American agriculture since the territorial period. Photographed here, approximately one hundred years later, is an unidentified farmer harvesting corn.

the nation's leading and most prolific agricultural historians, R. Douglas Hurt. "In general," writes Professor Hurt, "prior to the 1960s the agricultural historiography of Kansas emphasizes economic and political change, broadly construed." Hurt examines the groundbreaking work of early agricultural historians such as Paul W. Gates, James C. Malin, and John D. Hicks, as well as more recent scholarship, and finds that with a few important exceptions the study of Kansas agriculture and rural life remains rooted in an economic perspective.

According to Professor Hurt, agricultural historiography has made the greatest contribution to our understanding of the Kansas experience in seven areas of inquiry that serve as the organizing structure for his essay: land policy, settlement, agrarian revolts, Dust Bowl and Great Depression, ethnicity, technological change, and women. Perhaps scholars "have said enough" for now about Populism and the Dust Bowl, but the possibilities for significant contributions in others areas are plentiful. "With the emergence during the 1970s of the new rural social history as a sub-field of American history," observes Professor Hurt, "the historiographical boundaries for the agricultural and rural history of Kansas became expansive, if not limitless."

This observation is especially relevant for most facets of the twentieth century, and particularly the late twentieth century, which "remains an open and essentially unexamined field for scholarly inquiry." The editors hope scholars—old and young—will heed this most recent review essay's advice and take up the challenge.

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graphical boundaries for the agricultural and rural history of Kansas became expansive, if not limitless. Agricultural historiography has made the greatest contribution to our understanding of the Kansas experience in seven areas of inquiry: land policy, settlement, agrarian revolts, Dust Bowl and Great Depression, ethnicity, technological change, and women. This is not to say that scholars have not made important contributions in other areas of economic, political, and social history, particularly regarding production agriculture and government policy. Nevertheless, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries scholars began asking new questions, developing new methodologies, and offering insightful and sometimes challenging interpretations of Kansas history.

LAND POLICY

The study of Kansas agricultural history must begin with land policy because agriculture depended not only on soil and climate but also on the amount of land that farmers could acquire and use or operate. In 1924 Benjamin Hibbard, an agricultural economist, published the first historical survey of American land policy. So far as Kansas agricultural historiography is concerned, Hibbard criticized the Homestead Act because it did not meet the needs of settlers on the semi-arid Great Plains. Hibbard contended that a homestead of 160 acres was "untenable." Moreover, "It promoted perjury and profits among a large number of small adventurers." Put differently, federal policy encouraged speculation and the concentration of large holdings by the wealthy. Even so, Hibbard argued that the Homestead Act served as a "means of settling the wilderness," and east of the one-hundredth meridian it proved a success. Hibbard's work informed the critics of American land policy until 1936 when Paul Wallace Gates published "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System." Gates's article reinforced and built on Hibbard's criticism of the Homestead Act, and it set for a generation the critical standard for historians who analyzed federal land policy. Gates argued that between the Land Act of 1785 and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, federal land policy had been detrimental to the small-scale family farmer and was a calculated effort by Congress to aid wealthy speculators, which, in turn, hindered western settlement.¹

Gates also wrote the first and, in many respects, only major study of land policy in Kansas: *Fifty Million Acres*. Between the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which Gates considered a major congressional mistake, and the Populist era, land policy in Kansas, he argued, was the story of a "complex maze of inconsistent and badly-drawn legislation complicated by blundering, stupid, and corrupt administration." The Kansas-Nebraska Act, combined with Bleeding Kansas, made the "Kansas story a grotesque composite of all the errors involved in the growth of the American West." In this study Gates emphasized railroad land policies and the acquisition of Indian lands as well as settlement and tax practices; he did not con-

1. Benjamin Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924), 409; Robert P. Swierenga, "Land Speculation and Its Impact on American Economic Growth and Welfare: A Historiographical Review," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (July 1977): 283-302; Paul Wallace Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *American Historical Review* 41 (July 1936): 652-81. For the most comprehensive listing of Kansas agricultural and rural historiography, see Homer E. Socolofsky and Virgil W. Dean, eds., *Kansas History: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992).

sider agricultural college and internal improvement lands, creditors, or tenancy. Essentially, he was concerned only with landownership as a reason for the hostility between settlers and the railroads. Gates contended the railroads intentionally lagged in taking title to their land grants to avoid taxation and delay sales until the value increased, which, in turn, slowed school and road construction and the financing of local governments. The railroads, he argued, also were slow to determine their routes and thereby enable the restoration of unneeded lands granted to the railroads back to the federal government for distribution under the Homestead Act. Moreover, he contended, "The mortgage indebtedness and emergence of tenancy to which railroad land policy contributed were further reasons tending to bring not only the grants but also the railroads into dispute among many." In addition, when the railroads sold land to William A. Scully, "a much-hated person who was involved in creating America's greatest individually-owned estate," Kansas resented the railroads even more.²

Gates argued that during the 1930s tenancy was an early and common feature of agriculture across the Midwest long before the end of the public domain. He contended that tenancy was a product of an "incongruous land system" that permitted speculators, land companies, and large-scale landholders to purchase great blocks of public domain and wait for settlement to drive up land prices. Then, they divided their large holdings into small farms for rent to individuals who could not purchase large tracts of public domain or smaller acreages of more expensive land. As a result, tenancy prevented the creation of an independent, landowning class of small-scale, family farmers. Gates held land speculators and money lenders responsible for the emergence of tenancy in the prairie states. As land values rose, farmers who purchased acreage, usually at usurious interest rates, often lost those lands when agricultural prices fell. Land speculators and money lenders combined to force many farm owners into tenancy. Thus, tenancy was the result of a poorly planned public land policy that favored the rich rather than the establishment of a democratic system of landownership.³

Gates, of course, interpreted the problem of American land policy and tenancy from the perspective of the 1930s when farm foreclosures during the Great Depression plagued the countryside. Historians



Many historians have emphasized that railroad land policies were a significant factor in promoting settlement in Kansas. This booklet is one of many that encouraged men and women to come west to make their homes on Kansas railroad land.

2. Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts Over Kansas Land Policy, 1854–1890* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1954), xi, xii, 283. Homer E. Socolofsky has provided a corrective to Gates's view of Scully as a tyrannical, if not dishonest, alien landlord. Socolofsky considered Scully an honorable land speculator who demanded much from his tenants but who also treated them fairly. Scully acquired more than a quarter million acres in Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and Illinois, which he leased to more than fifteen hundred tenants. In Marion County, Kansas, Scully earned the sobriquet "Tyrant Scully" by his enemies who succeeded in gaining state legislation to restrict the ownership of land in the state by aliens, that is, nonresidents. Scully's leases always proved exacting and his preference for cash rent soon became the standard for leases in the state. By the time of his death in 1906, tenants and others considered him an honest, fair, even progressive landlord. See Homer E. Socolofsky, *Landlord William Scully* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979).

3. Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," 652–81. For a collection of Gates's articles that give easy access to his work on land policy, see Paul W. Gates, *Landlords and Tenants on the Prairie Frontier: Studies in American Land Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973).

Homes in Kansas



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Primarily basing his study on the records of the J. B. Watkins Mortgage Company in Lawrence, historian Allan G. Bogue found that easterners considered mortgages to be successful forms of investment in the Middle West. This document of the J. B. Watkins Company promoted "Fertile Farms in Kansas . . . A Large Number of Farms for Sale at Moderate Prices."

blamed the moneyed interests—speculators and creditors—for many farm problems during that decade as well as for placing American agriculture on the road to ruin, especially through forced tenancy. These scholars also wanted to use history to influence public policy, particularly to right the wrongs of the past by checking the power of the wealthy. Ideology rather than economic theory became the basis for their explanations of cause and effect.⁴

By 1963, however, Gates had reconsidered the Homestead Act and attributed it to fostering farm-making across much of the West. Indeed, Gates had begun to recast his view of speculation, tenancy, and the federal land-disposal system. In 1964 he wrote that homesteaders were the "beneficiaries of a liberal, generous and enlightened land system whatever its weakness," and he later held that "the public domain had been so disposed of as to increase the class of small landowners, as Jefferson had desired." In the late 1970s he praised American land policy for providing "flexibility," particularly for farmers who sought to develop farms larger than permitted by the Homestead Act.⁵

In 1968 Gates wrote "That 1,322,107 homesteaders carried their entries to final patent after 3 or 5 years of residence is overwhelming evidence that, despite the poorly framed legislation with its invitation to fraud, the Homestead Law was the successful route to farm ownership of the great majority of settlers moving into the newer area of the West after 1862." Since the 1960s scholars for the most part have abandoned federal land policy in relation to the agricultural settlement of Kansas, although some turned to it again in the context of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years of the 1930s, particularly in relation to the resettlement and land-utilization programs designed to help farmers stay on the land or return it to federal control for conservation purposes.⁶

Scholars have not studied tenancy in Kansas on a scale comparable to that in Iowa, but Allan G. Bogue published an important book entitled *Money at Interest* that discusses the farm mortgage system in Kansas. Primarily basing his study on the records of the J. B. Watkins Mortgage Company in Lawrence, Bogue found that mortgages were recognized forms of investment in the Middle West by easterners, both large and small scale. In Kansas, "Money loaned on the security of agricultural land in the newly opened western state returned a handsome rate of interest." For Bogue, eastern lenders provided a useful credit service, which contrasts with the thinking of Populist reformers who considered them usurious rogues preying on needy farmers. Still, Bogue contended that land agents operated with little supervision or regulation, and they gouged commissions from land buyers. Historians could use his studies of tenancy in the Midwest along with those of Robert Swierenga and Donald Winters

4. Donald Winters, "Agricultural Tenancy in the Nineteenth-Century Middle West: The Historiographical Debate," *Indiana Magazine of History* 78 (June 1982): 128–53.

5. Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Act: Free Land Policy in Operation, 1862–1935," in *Land Use Policy and Problems in the United States*, ed. Howard W. Ottoson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); Gates, "The Homestead Law in Iowa," *Agricultural History* 37 (April 1964): 78; Gates, "Homesteading in the High Plains," *ibid.* 51 (January 1977): 109.

6. Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (1968; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1979), 798; see also Lawrence B. Lee, *Kansas and the Homestead Act, 1862–1905* (New York: Arno Press, 1979); E. Louise Peffer, *The Closing of the Public Domain: Disposal and Reservation Policies, 1900–50* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1951).

to study further the history of agricultural tenancy in Kansas during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷

Overall, the history of land policy in relation to ownership, credit, mortgages, and tenancy has given the agricultural history of Kansas an important economic foundation. Much of the agricultural and rural history of Kansas that followed would be based on or linked to economic considerations and the importance of the market economy.

SETTLEMENT

James C. Malin also set the standard for the study of settlement in relation to adaptation and production in Kansas agriculture. Malin is the closest counterpart to Marc Bloch, who created the Annales School of historical analysis that emphasized the everyday life of rural people. Malin has been the only historian who systematically applied theory to the study of Kansas agricultural history. Although Malin's work reached beyond Kansas to offer an ecological explanation of the agricultural history of the Great Plains, other scholars largely ignored it until the late twentieth century. Specifically, Malin integrated culture, human action, and the environment in relation to agricultural adaptation in Kansas. More than any previous scholar, Malin understood the inextricable link between the physical environment and human settlement and occupancy of the land. He also believed that the study of local social and environmental history was a prerequisite to understanding history in larger state, national, and international contexts. He wrote, "Local history is the foundation of all history." In contrast to Bloch, however, Malin emphasized the natural rather than the social sciences in his work.⁸

In the 1930s Malin moved the agricultural history of Kansas away from the accounts of trial and tribulation by the farmers who lived and endured the settlement experience and who wrote about it. In his pathbreaking studies Malin used evidence gleaned from the state census schedules and county newspapers to pro-



Historian James C. Malin contended that while the environment influenced human behavior, settlers' social conditions and cultural values played a more significant role in agricultural development. He wrote, "People are more important than the physical environment. People can make choices." Here a pioneer family poses beside its sod home in Finney County.

7. Allan G. Bogue, *Money at Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955), 265; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (1963; reprint, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 56; Robert P. Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968); Donald L. Winters, *Farmers Without Farms: Agricultural Tenancy in Nineteenth-Century Iowa* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978); Winters, "Agricultural Tenancy in the Midwest," 128–53.

8. Robert P. Swierenga, "The Malin Thesis of Grassland Acculturation and the New Rural History," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 5 (1986): 14; Robert W. Johannsen, "James C. Malin: An Appreciation," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 38 (Winter 1972): 462; Swierenga, "Towards the New Rural History: A Review Essay," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 6 (June 1973): 111.

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vide a new assessment of Kansas farm life, particularly regarding the turnover of farm population and rural persistence patterns. Malin worked from the premise that history needed to be written from the bottom up, a belief clearly enunciated as early as 1940. Several years later he elaborated his thoughts in *The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to Its History*. Here Malin drew on ecology, climatology, geology, geography, and the social sciences to provide a context for understanding Kansas agriculture as part of the grasslands of the Great Plains. Essentially, Malin summarized his ideas about population, agriculture, land tenure, tenancy, persistence rates, and farm organizations that he had developed during more than a decade of research, writing, and thought, particularly regarding the mobility of settlers and the migration of immigrants. By so doing he not only contributed new knowledge about the agricultural history of Kansas, but he also developed new statistical techniques for sampling and analyzing state and federal census data that became the foundation for the work of the new social historians thirty years later. His integration of natural history in his work also laid the foundation for the new subfield of environmental history that developed during the 1970s.⁹

Malin, however, was not a geographical or environmental determinist, like Frederick Jackson Turner or Walter Prescott Webb. Rather, he contended that while the environment influenced human behavior, it could not predetermine actions. Instead, the prevailing social conditions and cultural values of the settlers played a more significant role in historical developments. He wrote, "People are more important than the physical environment. People can make choices. Even submission to determinism is a matter of choice." Kansas farmers, then, could and would adapt to the environment. It did not control them. The environment set the general parameters for settlement, occupancy, and persistence, often measured as agricultural success. How farmers lived, however, that is, how they used the environment, depended on their society and culture. Put differently, "The individual is the ultimate creative force in civilization." The environment, for example, would prevent farmers in western Kansas from raising corn without irrigation, but they could adapt and grow hard, red winter wheat. Indeed, Malin believed that historians and geographers placed "too much emphasis . . . upon space and not enough upon people in time and in the capacity of man to unfold the potentialities of the mind in discovery of new properties of the earth." Many environmental historians during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries held similar views or at least gave people agency for changing the environment, but often they apparently had not read Malin and therefore posed their insights as new, revealing, and important.¹⁰

9. James C. Malin, "The Turnover of Farm Population in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 4 (November 1935): 339–72; Malin, "The Adaptation of the Agricultural System to Sub-Humid Environment: Illustrated Activities of the Wayne Township Farmers' Club of Edwards, County, Kansas, 1886–1893," *Agricultural History* 10 (July 1936): 118–41; Malin, "Space and History: Reflections on the Closed-Space Doctrines of Turner and McKinder and the Challenge of Those Ideas by the Air Age," *Agricultural History* 18 (July 1944): 126; Malin, "Local Historical Studies and Population Problems," in *The Cultural Approach to History*, ed. Caroline Farrar Ware (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 300; Malin, *The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to Its History* (1956; reprint, New York: Peter Smith, 1967); Allan G. Bogue, "The Heirs of James C. Malin: A Grassland Historiography," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (Spring 1981): 108–10.

10. Malin, *The Grassland of North America*, 44; Robert P. Swierenga, "Theoretical Perspectives on the New Rural History: From Environmentalism to Modernization," *Agricultural History* 56 (July 1982): 499–500; Malin, *Essays on Historiography* (Lawrence, Kans.: 1946), 130; Malin, *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas: A Study in Adaptation to a Subhumid Geographical Environment* (Lawrence: Univer-

Malin's work provided a revisionist corrective to the work of Frederick Jackson Turner who held that the frontier was, in part, a boundary that moved westward as the population increased. Malin argued that the Kansas frontier frequently lost population, and settlers often came from noncontiguous states rather than in a stream of westward moving pioneers from settled areas in Kansas and Missouri. For Malin, the frontier was open ended. Its existence did not depend on the availability of space because land-use always existed in a state of flux. The frontier was fluid not rigid.¹¹

Thereafter, Malin's interests took him away from the agricultural history of Kansas. Even so, his systematic research in the agricultural census and county records enabled him to generalize about settlement with greater precision than ever before. By the late twentieth century, however, some scholars, while recognizing Malin's pioneer work regarding the adaptation of culture to the environment, criticized him for advocating the conquest of nature to meet the needs of the market economy. The particularly moralistic environmental historians were the most critical and noted that while Malin asked profound questions he provided old, economic answers. Still, Malin used statistical analysis based on census schedules and tax, land, and church records, and by so doing he preceded by thirty years the "new social historians" who used these techniques.¹²

With the exception of Malin's work, until the mid-twentieth century much of the early agricultural history of Kansas emphasized what soon became the well-told story of hardship, perseverance, and triumph of homesteaders and other settlers in the nineteenth century. John Ise told the story particularly well in his au-



Much of the early agricultural history of Kansas emphasized hardships endured on the prairie and settlers' perseverance to overcome them. This drawing, entitled Fighting a Prairie Fire, appears in historian Everett Dick's highly regarded work The Sod-House Frontier.

sity Press of Kansas, 1944); Malin, "Grassland, 'Treeless,' and 'Subhumid': A Discussion of Some Problems of the Terminology of Geography," *Geographical Review* 37 (May 1947): 241–50; Malin, *The Conquering Brain and the Skillful Hand in the United States* (Lawrence, Kans.: 1955), 405. In *Winter Wheat* Malin studied agricultural development during the late nineteenth century in central and eastern Kansas. In this book he attacked the Agricultural Adjustment Administration for hindering agricultural progress through regulations and state control. This work remains useful for learning about the Mennonites' introduction of a hard, red winter wheat, and technological change, especially for processing wheat into flour. It also remains an important example of Malin's belief that behavioral adaptation to the environment enabled settlers to succeed.

11. Swierenga, "The Malin Thesis of Grassland Acculturation and the New Rural History," 16, 18.

12. Joe Anderson, "James C. Malin: Innovator and Iconoclast," manuscript, private collection of author. For relatively easy access to Malin's writings, see Robert P. Swierenga, ed., *History and Ecology: Studies of the Grassland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). See also Thomas Burnell Colbert, "A Most Original Thinker: James C. Malin on History and Technology," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Autumn 1996): 178–87; Swierenga, "James C. Malin," in *Historians of the American Frontier*, ed. John R. Wunder (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988).

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tobiographical/fictional account of the homesteading experience of his family in Kansas. The hardships of debt, prairie fire, blizzards, dust storms, farm accidents, deaths, plowing, and fence-, cabin-, and home building transcend into settlement, railroad construction, and elevator building, all of which brought access to national and world markets, money, and the promise of a better life. Other settlers would record similar experiences in the *Kansas Historical Collections* of the Kansas State Historical Society, but all essentially told the same story of hardship and triumph over the environment and the land. Everett Dick ranks among the historians who related this information particularly well. In *The Sod-House Frontier* Dick chronicled the economic and social experience of Kansas settlers and others on the Central Plains. Carl Coke Rister also generalized about the daily life of farm families, including health remedies, religion, and education in the *Southern Plainsmen*.¹³

In 1966 Gilbert C. Fite provided a survey of Kansas agriculture in a chapter included in *The Farmers' Frontier, 1865–1900*. Although Fite gave his study a Turnerian inevitability, his discussion of farmer's crops, technology, and new techniques, such as the use of summer fallow and irrigation, as well as his analysis of land laws and debt, moved future work far beyond previous studies. Fite used the census schedules selectively for illustration and generalization, rather than systematically, as had Malin, to provide in-depth analysis of agriculture. Fite was particularly good at describing the vulnerability of settlers to unpredictable changes in agricultural prices and the weather. Craig Miner's *West of Wichita* also contributed important social and cultural as well as economic substance to this narrative.¹⁴

The history of agricultural settlement in Kansas has an underlying economic assumption that men and women would make the land pay, that is, profitable and by so doing improve their standard of living. Despite environmental problems, settlers grasped for the opportunity to participate in a profitable market economy. Often, however, the goal exceeded their reach due to inexperience, inadequate resources, and bad timing. Economic affairs, broadly construed, could be as cruel as the weather to Kansas farmers, and scholars were quick to note it.

AGRARIAN REVOLTS

The published studies of the late nineteenth-century agrarian revolt in Kansas center on the People's Party (Populists), with works on the Patrons of Husbandry, commonly known as the Grange, and the Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, known as the Southern Farmers' Alliance, included in more general publications. In 1913, for example, Solon Justice Buck provided the first study of the Patrons of Husbandry. He primarily focused on the founding of the order, its organizational structure, economic purpose, and the attempts of the order to achieve protective legislation, with the railroads the main target. Nearly sixty years later Sven Nordin argued in *The Rich Harvest* that the Patrons of Husbandry

13. John Ise, *Sod and Stubble* (1936; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967); Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854–1890* (1937; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Carl Coke Rister, *Southern Plainsmen* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938).

14. Gilbert C. Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier, 1865–1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); Bogue, "The Heirs of James C. Malin," 111; Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865–1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

never lost its focus on the social and educational purposes of the order. In fact, while the political and economic activities of the Grange ultimately failed, some dedicated patrons maintained their local organization based on the social and educational intent of founder Oliver Hudson Kelley. Although Donald Marti does not refer to Kansas in his study of Grange women, he provides a useful basis for generalization about the activities of women in the organization. Marti contends that farm women joined the Grange, held office, and often functioned as equals with males members. By so doing they gained political experience, and they used the Grange platform to demand the right to vote. Consequently, Grange women were precursors to the feminist movement of the twentieth century. Similarly, Thomas A. Woods does not specifically discuss Kansas in his study of republican ideology and the Grange. Woods contends that the Grange formed as a radical organization, based on the combined ideology of Jeffersonian republicanism and Jacksonian liberalism. The result was an organization that sought to restrict individual liberty through legislative regulation of monopoly capitalism, that is, big business, especially railroads and banking institutions.¹⁵

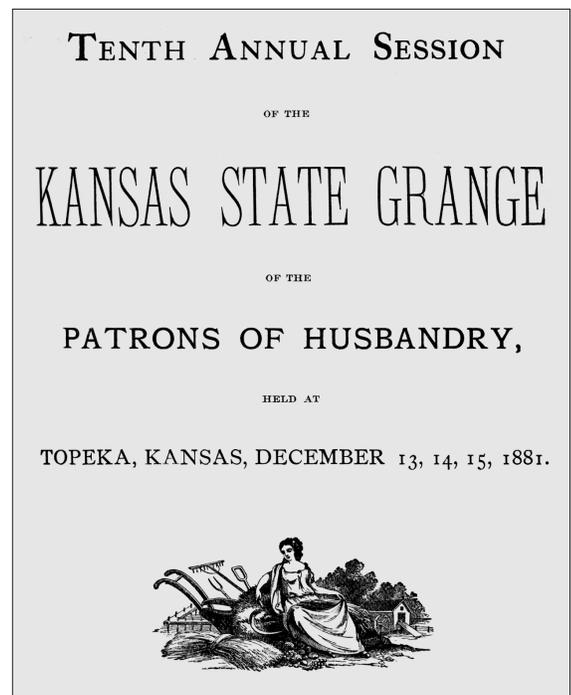
Other studies evaluate the role of the Union Labor Party in the agrarian politics of Kansas, while Robert C. McMath has traced the origins of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Although established in Texas, the Southern Farmers' Alliance rapidly spread across Kansas where many farmers quickly jettisoned the original social and educational purposes of the organization for nonpartisan political activity that would gain legislative protection from a host of economic abuses by the railroads and mortgage companies. In Kansas the cooperative movement remained strong from the heyday of the Grange a decade earlier, and alliance members became even more vocal advocates for protective economic legislation that would benefit farm men and women. McMath's social history of the Southern Farmers' Alliance is the most thorough analysis of the organization in Kansas.¹⁶

Populism has been the major area of study, and no other topic in American agricultural historiography has generated such a multiplicity of interpretations and perspectives. Populism did not attract major attention until 1931 when John D. Hicks provided an economic and political history of the movement that set the interpretive standard and consensus about the Populists for nearly a generation. Following Hicks, many historians of midwestern agriculture tended to see farmers as political and economic progressives and well-meaning patriarchs who struggled to overcome economic forces beyond their control.¹⁷

15. Solon Justice Buck, *The Granger Movement* (1913; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969); Sven Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867–1900* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1974); Donald Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Thomas A. Woods, *Knights of the Plow: Oliver Hudson Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991).

16. R. Douglas Hurt, "John R. Rogers: The Union Labor Party, Georgism and Agrarian Reform," *Journal of the West* 16 (January 1977): 10–15; Robert C. McMath Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

17. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931); Worth Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 16 (Spring 1993): 54–69.



The published studies of the late nineteenth-century agrarian revolt in Kansas center on the People's Party (Populists), the Patrons of Husbandry, commonly known as the Grange, and the Southern Farmers' Alliance



Many historians agreed that Populism offered the last, best hope for political reform that would protect the general welfare of the people. Historian Walter Nugent contended that Populism was “a political response to economic distress.”

In 1955, however, Richard Hofstadter argued that farmers looked backward to a past where they had greater control of their lives, and their conservatism often proved reactionary. Hofstadter challenged the interpretations of historians who considered the Populists a progressive economic, social, and political force. He contended they were reactionaries who longed to return to a bygone age when their lives were untouched by both government and corporate America, much in contrast to Hick’s interpretation that the Populists were left-of-center on the political spectrum and a progressive force in late nineteenth-century America. In 1962, however, Norman Pollack provided the best challenge to Hofstadter by arguing that the Populists were a progressive social force that offered the last, best hope for radical, political change in a socialist direction that would protect the general welfare and democracy in the United States. He later moderated that interpretation by calling Populism “a movement of reform, not radicalism.” Overall, the Populists sought “a more humane political and social order,” guaranteed by a national government that privileged the rights of the individual and general welfare over monopolistic capitalism and the political power that it generated.¹⁸

In the 1950s Victor Ferkiss also caused a stir by likening the Populists to Fascists because of their anti-Semitism and hatred of British bankers and eastern creditors. After considerable debate, Walter Nugent put this view to rest by convincingly arguing that the Kansas Populists were not anti-Semitic, xenophobic, or bigots. Nugent contended that Populism was “a political response to economic distress,” and many Populists were first- or second-generation immigrants. Simply put, the Populists “were people who were seeking the solution of concrete economic distress through the instrumentality of a political party. . . . This involved profoundly the political cooperation of the foreign-born, and it involved a deep respect and receptivity for new American institutions and ideas.” Nevertheless, much remained to be said about the Populists.¹⁹

In 1976 Lawrence Goodwyn, a journalist working in academia, renewed interest in the People’s Party when he argued that the real Populists emerged from the cooperative movement of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance, and Kansas was the center. In Kansas the cooperative movement created a “new democratic community” that became Populism collectively and the People’s Party specifically. Put simply, Goodwyn concluded, “It was the corporate state that the People’s Party attempted to bring under democratic control.” But, by ignoring Nebraska, or at least calling the agrarian revolt in that state a “shadow movement,” because it lacked a cooperative tradition, he challenged a host of scholars to look anew at Populism in the West. They did, and they largely disagreed with his interpretation. Robert C. McMath challenged Goodwyn’s work

18. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955); Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Pollack, *The Humane Economy: Populism, Capitalism and Democracy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), xvi.

19. Victor Ferkiss, “Populist Influences on American Fascism,” *Western Political Quarterly* 10 (June 1957): 350–73; Walter Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

by arguing that while the cooperative movement was important for the radicalization of the Populists, the movement had greater social and cultural roots and significance than Goodwyn admitted. McMath wrote:

The picnics, rallies, and camp meetings had more than recreational value. Except for the encampments, they were traditional focal points of political expression, and they provided the Alliance with a means of mobilizing political sentiment without appearing to violate its nonpartisan position. In 1889 and 1890, the order used such gatherings to measure candidates by the Alliance yardstick, and in 1891 and 1892, they provided a base from which to organize the People's Party.

Society and cultural foundations, then, had as much to do with the success of the Farmers' Alliance as the cooperative movement.²⁰

Gene Clanton has provided the best study of Populists in Kansas and in Congress. He found them to be articulate exponents of the party's platform. Clanton also argued that Populists sought important economic, social, and political changes that would have benefited the general welfare substantially. In relation to the state as a whole, Clanton concluded that Populism was "the last significant expression of an old regional tradition that derived from Enlightenment sources that had been filtered through a political tradition that bore the distinct imprint of Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Lincolnian democracy." Human rights bolstered by economic rights were central to the movement, and Populism was more developed and successful in Kansas than in any other state or territory. Although the Populists failed to achieve nationalization of all industries, public in nature, that essentially were monopolistic, they "fought the good fight." Until the civil rights movement sixty years later, the Kansas Populists created "the most significant mass democratic movement in American history." Clanton takes a broader biographical approach in *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men*.²¹

The remaining major studies of Kansas Populism include the works of Norman Pollack, Jeffrey Ostler, and Scott G. McNall. Pollack's last two works primarily are based on political and economic theory. In *The Humane Economy* he studies the economic and political features of Populism that made it an untenable political organization and movement within capitalist America. In *The Just Polity* Pollack discusses the constitutional, legal, and moral features of Populist thought that created its foundation of faith in the American political process. In contrast, Ostler compares the People's Party in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, and concludes that it developed in Kansas and Nebraska because the Democratic and Republican Parties ignored the needs of farmers. In contrast, the Republican legislature in Iowa made the political accommodations necessary to prevent the emergence of a

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20. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Robert C. McMath Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977), 76.

21. Gene Clanton, *Congressional Populism and the Crisis of the 1890s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Clanton, *Populism: The Humane Preference in America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), xvi, xvii; Peter Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William A. Pepper and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969).

Malin believed natural causes played a major role in the creation of dust storms, but others attempted to blame settlement, agriculture, and capitalist greed for the Dust Bowl.

third party. McNall analyzes class formation among the agrarian discontents from the Civil War to the twentieth century.²²

With the exception of biographical studies and local histories, the historiography of Kansas Populism may have peaked for further work, unless some new approach can address it. Overall, scholars have reached a consensus on the origin and development of the People's Party and the Populist movement in Kansas.

Essentially, that consensus is based on economic matters that caused farm and rural men and women to demand government regulation to ensure fair competition and participation in the market place. Indeed, the intellectual, political, and social history of the Populist movement has been grounded on perceived economic problems, real or imagined. As such, the historiography of the late nineteenth-century agrarian revolt essentially has been economic in its perspective in terms of the scholarly analysis of wealth and privilege as well as prospects and possibilities, much as the underlying concerns guiding the study of land policy and settlement in Kansas.

DUST BOWL AND GREAT DEPRESSION

The Dust Bowl also has been of interest to historians of American agriculture and Kansas since the 1940s. However, early in 1935 Paul B. Sears published *Deserts on the March*. Although he gave scant attention to Kansas, he provided a sweeping study of humankind's abuse of the land and agriculture's effect on desertification by destroying soil-holding grasses. In Kansas, Sears argued, the 1920s were years of favorable rainfall and good wheat prices, and farmers used power machinery to break more loose, friable land for grain. When drought killed the wheat crop, the soil blew with the wind. Across the southern Great Plains in general and Kansas in particular, "The drought, which was the apparent cause of the disaster, was certainly predictable—not in any exact sense, of course, but as unavoidably due to occur at intervals." Specifically, Sears proposed, "A system of agriculture had been put into operation in disregard of certain hazards of the shortgrass region, and the dust storms became the costly, spectacular evidence of this fact." Humankind's exploitation of the grasslands caused the Dust Bowl.²³

James C. Malin disagreed. In 1946 Malin published three articles on the history of dust storms in Kansas from 1850 to 1900. Using U.S. Weather Bureau reports, local newspapers, and contemporary accounts as well as scientific evidence in the form of soil analysis and tree ring calculations, he showed that drought and dust storms have been natural phenomena of the Great Plains. Wind-deposited soil that formed the areas of Kansas most susceptible to erosion, drought that came in measurable cycles, loss of soil-holding vegetation due to prairie fires, and

22. Norman Pollack, *The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Pollack, *The Humane Economy*; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880–1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Scott G. McNall, *Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also Marilyn Dell Brady, "Populism and Feminism in a Newspaper by and for Women of the Kansas Farmers' Alliance, 1891–1894," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Winter 1984–1985): 280–90; Dorothy Rose Blumbey, "Mary Elizabeth Lease, Populist Orator: A Profile," *ibid.* 1 (Spring 1978): 3–15; Rodney O. Davis, "Prudence Crandall, Spiritualism, and Populist Reform in Kansas," *ibid.* 3 (Winter 1980): 239–54.

23. Paul B. Sears, *Deserts on the March*, 4th ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 13, 130.

improper cultivation, among other reasons, caused dust storms, which he considered normal for Kansas and the Great Plains. Malin believed natural causes played a major role in the creation of dust storms, a matter that Sears and some later historians ignored or de-emphasized in their attempts to blame settlement, agriculture, and capitalist greed for the creation of the Dust Bowl.²⁴

A year later Vance Johnson, editor of the *Dalhart Texan*, published the first book on the Dust Bowl. In *Heaven's Table Land*, Johnson primarily traced the causes and effects of the dust storms on the Texas Panhandle, but he also included southwestern Kansas in his narrative. Johnson provided a clear, brisk, descriptive, and often compelling text. It is particularly good as the record of daily life during the Dust Bowl years, and it remains a useful book for anyone studying Kansas agriculture during the 1930s. Thirty years later a trilogy of books on the Dust Bowl, each with a different interpretive perspective, provided the first major study of the region by professional historians. Several other books trailed later, but the interpretive parameters had been set.²⁵

In 1977 Donald Worster published *The Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. In this gracefully written study, which clearly is influenced by the arguments of Paul B. Sears forty years earlier, Worster criticized farmers for plowing more than one hundred million acres in the Dust Bowl states of Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas during the early twentieth century when wheat prices skyrocketed, primarily because of World War I and during the 1920s when they needed increased production to pay off long-term debts contracted during the war years. For Worster human habitation, that is, exploitation for economic gain, had more to do with the creation of the Dust Bowl than natural conditions. Worster wrote, "The Dust Bowl . . . was the inevitable outcome of a culture that deliberately, self-consciously, set itself that task of dominating and exploiting the land for all it was worth." As a result, "The Dust Bowl was the darkest moment in the twentieth-century life of the southern plains." Worster argued that "Capitalism . . . has been the decisive factor in this nation's use of nature."²⁶

Worster blamed the exploitative nature of American culture for the Dust Bowl. Capitalism, which meant greed and the exploitation of nature, especially by an unregulated upper class, brought the dust storms of the 1930s. Plains residents had a choice to exploit the environment, and they chose to do so. They considered



The great plow-up of the Plains for wheat during the 1920s exposed the land to severe wind erosion that, coupled with drought, led to the severity of the dust storms of the 1930s. This unidentified Kansas farmer converts vast acres of soil-holding sod into loose, friable land for planting grain.

24. James C. Malin, "Dust Storms: Part One, 1850–1860," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 14 (May 1946): 129–44; Malin, "Dust Storms, Part Two, 1861–1880," *ibid.* (August 1946): 265–96; Malin, "Dust Storms, Part Three, 1881–1900," *ibid.* (November 1946): 391–413.

25. Vance Johnson, *Heaven's Table Land* (New York: Farr, Straus, 1947).

26. Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 4, 5.

THE A.A.A. NO!

**Bureaucratic rule is
against the laws of nature
and human nature**

IN SEEKING to comply with The Country Home's proposal that I present my reaction to the planning concept as now applied to agriculture in this country, I find myself confronted by a twofold difficulty: (1) A superabundance of true indictments against that concept and the agency of government charged with its interpretation and administration; (2) a certain restraint imposed by the ordinary limitations of print on language most appropriate to any adequate discussion of it. For it is not easy to deal in polite diction with a topic so completely cockeyed and crazy.

The federal government frequently has been both blamed and praised for its involvement in farming. Although the Agricultural Adjustment Acts (AAA) of 1933 and 1938 were major relief programs developed to provide farm aid, they were criticized for facilitating governmental controls.

nature nothing less than capital for use to achieve profit, that is, to increase their wealth by plowing the grasslands for wheat. Underlying Worster's argument about the causes of the Dust Bowl is his contention that the federal government failed to restrain those who would abuse the land for economic gain. For Worster, the federal government proved derelict in its responsibility to provide an alternative to commercial agriculture, that is, an "intermediate ground." Although unstated, he seemingly implied that the federal government should force that economic and social change and mandate it with landownership or other controls. Worster wrote, "There was nothing in the plains society to check the progress of commercial farming, nothing to prevent it from taking the risks it was willing to take for profit. That is how and why the Dust Bowl came about." Capitalistic greed not drought caused the Dust Bowl.²⁷

In 1979 Paul Bonnifield published a different interpretation of the history of the Dust Bowl. In *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt, and Depression*, Bonnifield took the federal government to task for nearly everything that went wrong and could be attributed to the creation of the Dust Bowl. Bonnifield charged that the federal government interfered too much rather than too little in the Dust Bowl. Federal officials, for example, used the Agricultural Adjustment Act to justify land-use planning that smacked of socialism and coercion. Yet the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 did not assist small-scale farmers who often suffered the most serious economic distress. Bonnifield correctly argues that USDA officials viewed many of these small-scale farmers as expendable. Too many families worked the land, only the most capital intensive and large-scale operators could survive, and the government aided them in the name of efficiency and cost-effective support. Bonnifield was particularly critical of the federal government's land-purchase program designed to remove some families from the land so the croplands could be reseeded to grass to prevent soil blowing. This program, he argued, contributed little to soil conservation and essentially coerced people to leave the land. Bonnifield wrote that "Relief aid . . . was designed to maintain the economic status quo and make the residents more dependent on federal assistance." Those who stayed eventually prospered despite the efforts of the federal government to aid them.²⁸

My own book, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History*, published in 1981, takes a middle ground between Worster and Bonnifield. In it I traced the history of dust storms on the Southern Plains prior to the 1930s. While I acknowledged that the great plow-up of the region for wheat during the 1920s exposed the land to severe wind erosion, I attributed the effects of drought to the severity of the dust storms more than did Worster or Bonnifield. Essentially, I argued that had there been no drought there would have been no Dust Bowl resulting from the great plow-up of the 1920s because wheat is a plant that tenaciously holds the soil against wind erosion. I also argued that the agricultural relief programs of the federal government, while often flawed in conception and execution, made a significant economic difference in the Dust Bowl and, in terms

27. *Ibid.*, 7.

28. Paul Bonnifield, *The Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt, and Depression* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 45, 201.

of soil conservation and land-use planning, federal officials were about as successful as anyone could have expected considering the severity of the drought, the expanse of the problem, and the lack of scientific and technical knowledge about what to do other than throw more technology and money at the problem.²⁹

More than twenty years after this Dust Bowl trilogy, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg published *Rooted in Dust*. Her study is based on a sixteen-county area of southwestern Kansas where she focused on those who chose to stay rather than leave the Dust Bowl portion of the state. She wrote, "Farmers who were able to draw upon the resources available within families, such as emotional and financial support, and who were unable or unwilling to sell their land survived to enjoy the bounty of the Second World War." Their survival depended in no small part on the relief programs of the federal government. As a result most residents of the Kansas Dust Bowl stayed rather than joined the Okie migration to California. Brad D. Lookingbill has provided the latest book-length study in *Dust Bowl USA*. His purpose was to examine the ethnography of the Dust Bowl by using "deconstructive methods to analyze the nature of dystopia," that is, a bad place in public perception. Like Populism, scholars probably have said enough about the Dust Bowl, and they should give it a rest for at least a generation when new perspectives might be brought to bear on the subject.³⁰

The literature on agriculture during the Great Depression is voluminous. Most of these works relate to agricultural relief programs. Michael Johnston Grant has studied the efforts of Kansas and other Great Plains farmers to make the capital, technological, and managerial changes necessary to expand their operations and earn a middle-income lifestyle during the Great Depression and World War II. He focused on the role of the Farm Security Administration's Rural Rehabilitation Program to provide loans, grants, and technical advice to help "borderline" farm families prosper and remain on the land. His study is at once economic, political, and environmental. He also traced the ultimate failure of the Farm Security Administration to keep marginal farm families on the land. Other studies of Kansas agriculture during the 1930s also involve the analysis of government agencies, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Soil Conservation Service, and Land-Utilization Program, to meet proposed goals while noting unintended consequences.³¹

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29. R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981).

30. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 4; Brad D. Lookingbill, *Dust Bowl USA: Depression America and the Ecological Imagination, 1929–1941* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

31. Michael Johnston Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation on the Great Plains, 1929–1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). For example, see Peter Fearon, "From Self-Help to Federal Aid: Unemployment and Relief in Kansas, 1929–1932," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 13 (Summer 1990): 107–22; Michael W. Schuyler, "Drought and Politics 1936: Kansas as a Test Case," *Great Plains Journal* 15 (Fall 1975): 3–27; Donald Worster, "The Dirty Thirties: A Study of Agricultural Capitalism," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1986): 107–16; R. Douglas Hurt, "Prices, Payments, and Production: Kansas Wheat Farmers and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 1933–1939," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring–Summer 2000): 72–87; Hurt, "The National Grasslands: Origin and Development in the Dust Bowl," *Agricultural History* 59 (April 1985): 246–59; Hurt, "Federal Land Reclamation in the Dust Bowl," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1986): 94–106; Hurt, "Gaining Control of the Environment: The Morton County Land Utilization Project in the Kansas Dust Bowl," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Summer 1996): 140–53; Geoff Cunfer, "The New Deal's Land Utilization Program in the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 21 (Summer 2001): 193–210.

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nities. Immigrants
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An important related book is *The Suitcase Farming Frontier* by Leslie Hewes. Hewes studied absentee farmers during the 1930s, 1950s, and 1960s, focusing on Greeley, Hamilton, and Stanton Counties in western Kansas. He argued that absentee or suitcase farmers had flexibility and outside income. They could abandon their wheat lands if drought and dust storms ruined their crops. With little investment or expenditure for land, seed, and equipment, suitcase farmers, that is, those who lived far enough away to carry their suitcases for overnight stays while working the land, could easily take economic losses, and they had little incentive to use the best soil conservation techniques. They sought profits from wheat and little else. This is an important study by a geographer, and it merits the attention of anyone studying the agricultural history of Kansas.³²

Here, again, the study of Kansas agricultural and rural history during the 1930s essentially has been economic in perspective. For some scholars the market economy caused unprecedented abuse of the land, while the need for economic stability determined a host of federal programs, not all successful, to keep farmers on the land with an acceptable standard of living. Economic considerations still shape the historical record, although scholars have given increasing attention to the social history of the time.

ETHNICITY

During the 1960s some scholars began studying immigrant life in Kansas. Much of the article literature centered on the restricting effects of the Civil War and the influence of the railroads. These studies traced the arrival of the ex-dusters, Swedes, and Russian Jews. The focus centered on hardships and cultural disconnectedness, the latter of which the European cultural groups overcame, provided they learned English and adopted American customs. Economic motives tended to be the heart of these studies, and immigrant groups met with both success and failure.³³

Since the 1970s, when scholars became increasingly interested in social history to explain the significance of daily life, historians, geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists have turned to the study of agriculture and rural life. Much of their work regarding Kansas has involved immigration, settlement, and migration. Norman E. Saul, for example, traced the settlement of the Mennonites and Volga Germans from Russia. Their cultural distinctiveness and preference for isolation enabled them to resist acculturation, if not assimilation. The adoption of hard, red winter wheat and a strong work ethic brought economic success, while their most important contribution became their determination to stay in the areas where they settled rather than seek better lands or opportunities elsewhere. Other studies of ethnic settlement proved the difficulty of establishing homes on the

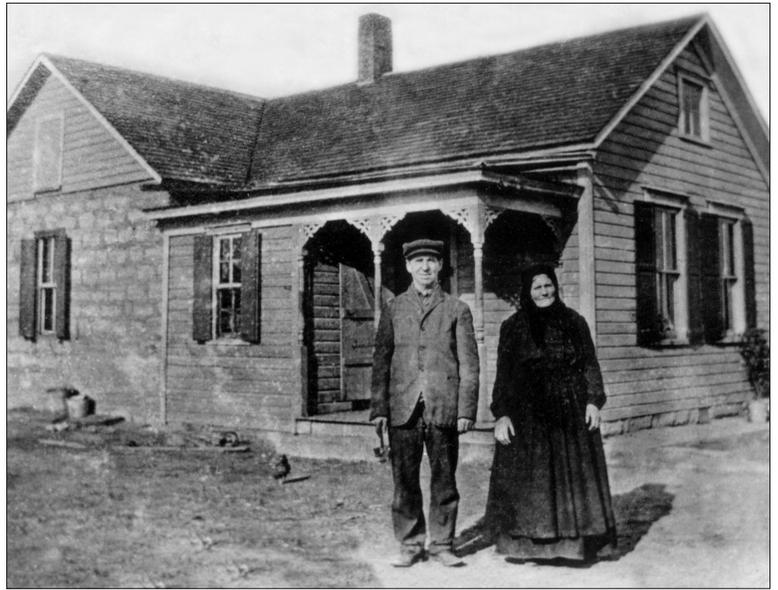
32. Leslie Hewes, *The Suitcase Farming Frontier: A Study in the Historical Geography of the Central Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973). See also Craig Miner, "Here Today, Here Tomorrow: G-K Farms in the Dust Bowl Years, Thomas County, Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 16 (Autumn 1993): 148–65. Miner finds Garvey and Kriss to be good "stewards" of the land.

33. Lisa M. Frehill-Rowe, "Postbellum Race Relations and Rural Land Tenure: Migration of Blacks and Whites to Kansas and Nebraska, 1870–1890," *Social Forces* 72 (September 1993): 77–92; Emory Lindquist, "The Swedish Immigrant and Life in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1963): 1–24; George M. Price, "The Russian Jews in America," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 48 (1958): 28–62; *ibid.*, part 2 (1958): 78–133.

Kansas plains. The English communities of Victoria, Wakefield, and Runnymede as well as the Danish socialist settlement near Hays failed for both economic and political reasons. By the late twentieth century scholars had become particularly interested in rural ethnicity in relation to family structures, the influence of women, and the role of the church in Kansas's agricultural settlements.³⁴

Two geographers have published important books on agricultural and rural ethnicity in Kansas that are suggestive for similar research in other areas of the state. In 1990 D. Aidan McQuillan, building on more than a decade of work, published *Prevailing Over Time* in which he discussed the reasons for the persistence of the ethnic groups that settled in Kansas between 1875 and 1925. McQuillan selected thirty-nine counties in central Kansas where he studied the settlement of the Swedes, Mennonites, and French Canadians. He showed that immigrant farmers had similar mobility rates as native-born farmers. Although the mobility rate was high for both groups, those who persisted, that is, stayed where they initially settled, tended to be older, wealthier, and supported larger families than those who moved from one place to another. McQuillan, however, particularly wanted to "understand the process whereby Europeans became Americans." In Kansas, landholding patterns precluded the reestablishment of European villages, community life, and farming practices. Rectangular fields and dispersed homesteads gave a new shape and isolation to their daily lives. Yet, "they simultaneously created areas of homogeneous settlement that became sharply distinctive communities. Immigrants became ethnics." Although immigrant ethnics proved mobile, high fertility rates and immigration from sister communities could keep ethnic communities vibrant. "But," McQuillan wrote, "more than anything else, financial security and community stability were essential conditions for the success of an ethnic community, its distinctive way of life, and its distinctive identity." Adaptation to the environment, as Malin suggested, contributed to security and stability, but success depended on assimilation and the ability to participate in the market economy. Ultimately, the church became the only institution to survive the immigrant experience.³⁵

Geographer Bradley H. Baltensperger observed that a farmer's ability to adjust farming operations to drought during the late nineteenth century proved the demarcation line between success and failure, persistence and mobility. He also noted that settlers who migrated from the Corn Belt attempted to farm by using



With the increased interest in social history, historians began focusing on cultural and rural life, which often included the study of ethnic settlements. Kansas agriculture was influenced by the large influx of Swedes and Volga Germans, among others. Pictured here are German Russian homesteaders in Ellis County.

34. Norman E. Saul, "The Migration of Russian Germans to Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring 1974): 38–62; Blanche M. Taylor, "The English Colonies in Kansas, 1870–1895," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 41 (1972): 17–35.

35. D. Aidan McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875–1925* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xvii–xviii.



The role of Latinos in the agricultural history of Kansas remains understudied, but recent scholarship has centered on their role in the meatpacking industry. With the coming of the large packing companies to western Kansas, the agricultural economy changed dramatically as Hispanics, willing to take on the hard and heavy jobs in the meatpacking plants, became a major contingent in the workforce. This 1979 sketch is of the Iowa Beef Processors plant near Garden City, which began operation in the early 1980s.

their customary techniques unmodified for a new environment. Those settlers who responded to drought by diversifying their crops adjusted first to their new environment, but those who settled during wetter periods retained their traditional practices until the environment forced them to adopt dryland farming techniques or irrigation. Geographer James R. Shortridge also has made an important contribution to the agricultural and rural history of Kansas with his study *Peopling the Plains*. Shortridge mapped the migration of certain groups to Kansas to understand various social

and cultural patterns that affected their behavior in American life, such as voting characteristics and denominational strength. Shortridge shows that although immigrant groups assimilated they tended to cluster with “their own kind” across Kansas long after the pioneer period. Anyone interested in the legacy of ethnic heritage in Kansas will consider the works of McQuillan, Baltensperger, and Shortridge essential reading.³⁶

The African American experience has received considerable attention in relation to the exodusters. These studies have focused on immigration, community development, and economic collapse. Anne P. W. Hawkins, however, has provided the most thorough analysis of African American farming. She found that few blacks operated viable farms by the 1930s, despite their belief that agriculture offered freedom and security in the Jeffersonian tradition. “Through the 1920s,” she wrote, “the agrarian ideal was believed to offer the best answer to racial injustice in employment and opportunity for black Kansans.” She found that “The media, local agricultural leaders, farmers’ institutes, and colonization organizations vigorously campaigned in support of agriculture” for African Americans, but they failed. Between 1900 and 1930 the number of farms operated by African Americans declined by nearly 50 percent. Capital and the market economy dictated success, and most African American farmers had insufficient financial resources or credit opportunities to acquire the land and equipment needed for commercial agricul-

36. Bradley H. Baltensperger, “Agricultural Adjustments to Great Plains Drought: The Republican Valley, 1870–1900,” in *The Great Plains: Environment and Culture*, ed. Brian W. Blouet and Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 43–60; James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where on the Kansas Frontier* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

ture. Consequently, like many white farmers, young and old, they soon moved to the cities where better economic opportunities prevailed.³⁷

The role of Latinos in the agricultural history of Kansas remains understudied, but recent scholarship has centered on their role in the meatpacking industry. During the late twentieth century technological change in the form of center-pivot irrigation and other irrigation systems, relatively cheap power, and improved pumps enabled farmers to raise corn where only dryland crops had grown previously. As farmers produced more livestock feed, cattle producers, including highly capitalized corporate feedlot owners, increased production, and the meatpacking industry moved to the juncture of feed and cattle, where good roads permitted rapid transportation of boxed beef to market. As a result, the agricultural economy of western Kansas changed dramatically. The local workforce, however, could not fill all of the newly created jobs, and Hispanics from Mexico and Central America and Latinos from the United States quickly took the hard, hot, and heavy jobs in the meatpacking plants that others did not want. By so doing, however, they changed the social, cultural, and economic relations of their communities, the ramifications of which need considerable study.³⁸

Although the history of rural ethnicity departed somewhat from strictly economic influences, scholars often still used economic considerations to explain migration within the state as well as persistence and success. Even so, the study of demographic change, often by the use of statistical analysis, has provided a new or at least renewed way, if Malin's work is considered, of tracing change over time. Moreover, scholars have just begun to investigate the significance of demographic change in the twenty-first century, particularly regarding the Latino communities in the meatpacking towns in relation to political and social change.

TECHNOLOGY

The historical literature on technological change in Kansas agriculture has emphasized hardware, that is, the introduction and use of binders, headers, tractors, combines, and irrigation. Much of this historiography has involved production rates and the relationship of technological adoption to commercial agriculture, profit, and debt. The agricultural hardware history of Kansas remains important, but new approaches to technological change have emerged among scholars. Tom Isern, for example, has led the field in this area of historical inquiry. In *Custom Combining on the Great Plains*, Isern considers this harvesting process not only a

The agricultural hardware history of Kansas remains important, but new approaches to technological change have emerged among scholars.

37. Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Glenn Schwendemann, "The 'Exodusters' on the Missouri," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1963): 25–40; Anne P. W. Hawkins, "Hoeing Their Own Row: Black Agriculture and the Agrarian Ideal in Kansas, 1880–1920," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 22 (Autumn 1999): 200–13; Gary R. Entz, "Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairies: 'Pap' Singleton's Cherokee County Colony," *ibid.* 19 (Spring 1996): 124–39; Joseph V. Hickey, "'Pap' Singleton's Dunlap Colony: Relief Agencies and the Failure of a Black Settlement in Eastern Kansas," *Great Plains Quarterly* 11 (Winter 1991): 23–36.

38. Robert Oppenheimer, "Acculturation or Assimilation: Mexican Immigrants in Kansas, 1900 to World War II," *Western Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1985): 429–48. See also Donald D. Stull and Michael J. Broadway, "The Effects of Restructuring on Beefpacking in Kansas," *Kansas Business Review* 14 (Fall 1999): 10–16; Jeff Roche, "Identity and Conservative Politics on the Southern Plains," in *The Future of the Southern Plains*, ed. Sherry L. Smith (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 169–98. Chapter 7 in Stull and Broadway, *Slaughterhouse Blues: The Meat and Poultry Industry in North America* (Belmont, Calif.: Thompson/Wadsworth, 2004), deals with Garden City, Kansas.



Observations of technological change in Kansas agriculture have emphasized hardware, that is, the introduction and use of binders, headers, tractors, combines, and irrigation. For example, the reverse side of the above photo notes, "The 4 horse implement has enabled the farmer to increase his labor output 32 times." Recent historical studies, however, have begun to examine the social and environmental relationship with technological developments.

technical adjustment by some farmers to avoid the investment risks in expensive machinery, but also a social process. He is particularly interested in logistics, employment, labor supply, and relationships between custom cutters and farm families. Indeed, the social relationships between custom cutter and farmer are as important as the combines and trucks that make this form of harvesting an institution. Custom cutters often are friendly, family acquaintances whose trust has been earned over years of service and dependability. Many wheat farmers await their arrival with the same anticipation of a spring shower or their delay with the same fear as an approaching squall line at harvest time. Isern continued his study of agricultural technology and social history in *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs*, which emphasizes wheat harvesting before the age of the combine as well as the technological innovations adopted by farmers and ranchers in the Flint Hills. In contrast Craig Miner discusses the adoption of technology on the large-scale wheat farm of John Kriss in northwestern Kansas. Miner's study is the only major description of the business aspect of wheat farming in twentieth-century Kansas.³⁹

Irrigation and its technology as well as its relationship to the environment also attracted scholarly attention during the late twentieth century. The Dust Bowl years, new developments in drilling and pumping technology, and cheap electrical power encouraged farmers in western Kansas to level lands and irrigate with furrows and sprinklers. By the late 1960s many farmers in western Kansas had tapped the Ogallala aquifer, and they used center-pivot sprinklers to irrigate crops, especially corn and alfalfa, where those crops could not profitably grow under dryland conditions. By so doing, they used technology to change land-use patterns, and irrigation gave them some control of the environment so long as the water lasted and the technology remained affordable. In this context, John Opie

39. Solomon L. Loewen, "Harvesting in Kansas During the Early Decades of This Century: A Reminiscence," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 13 (Summer 1990): 82–87; Peter Fearon, "Mechanization and Risk: Kansas Wheat Growers, 1915–1930," *Rural History [Great Britain]* 6 (October 1995): 229–50; Emma L. Bamberg (Virgil W. Dean, ed.), "'Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread': A Harvest Memoir," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring–Summer 2000): 6–11; R. Douglas Hurt, *American Farm Tools: From Hand-Power to Steam-Power* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1982); Hurt, *Agricultural Technology in the Twentieth Century* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1991); Thomas D. Isern, *Custom Combining on the Great Plains: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981); Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs: Harvesting and Threshing on the North American Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990); Craig Miner, *Harvesting the High Plains: John Kriss and the Business of Wheat Farming, 1920-1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

provided a major study of the exploitation of the Ogallala aquifer for Great Plains agriculture, and he warned of severe ecological repercussions from rapacious water-mining practices. Other scholars have investigated the technological, legal, and management contexts of groundwater irrigation. James Sherow also studied the development of irrigation and its effects on the environment along the Arkansas River in western Kansas. The technological history of Kansas agriculture in many respects, then, has been informed by economic matters that have affected social, legal, and political actions.⁴⁰

WOMEN

The role of women in the agricultural and rural history of Kansas primarily has involved memoirs and reflections of pioneer women who essentially conclude that life was hard but they endured. Although studies of farm women on the Great Plains and in American agriculture abound, they also emphasize the role of women in farm production. Yet, compared with other research on agricultural and rural history, the subject of rural women in Kansas remains understudied. Katherine Jellison has written one of the most important works on women in agriculture that has implications for Kansas, although she does not specifically focus on the Kansas experience. She argues that farm women benefited less and later than did men from the introduction of new technology. Male heads of households bought farm equipment first while the acquisition of domestic, that is, household, technology lagged. Technology also further divided agricultural work by gender. Still, Jellison argues that farm women did not willingly forfeit their productive roles on the farm. Indeed, agricultural production gave them economic and political power within the patriarchal family. Equally important, Jellison observed that new technology did not reduce women's labor on the farm but rather changed the type of work they performed. In addition, farm mechanization did not make women full-time homemakers by the 1960s. Instead, vertical integration of the poultry and the development of the frozen-food industries eliminated many home-production activities and gave women time for off-the-farm employment.

Similarly, Sandra Schackel argued that between World War II and the 1990s western women took off-the-farm employment to help pay bills, buy agricultural supplies, support their families, and generally subsidize the farm operation. Women also contributed to farm and ranch work as producers, not for subsistence but to ensure commercial viability of their family operations. At the same time, mechanization of the farm home made agricultural women more like middle-class, urban women. Studies are needed, however, about the effect of the Rural Electrification Administration on technological change in Kansas because women in other areas of the Midwest used electricity and government loans for new electrical equipment to purchase stoves, hot water heaters, irons, vacuum

40. R. Douglas Hurt, "Irrigation in Kansas Since 1930," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 4 (Summer 1979): 64–72; John Opie, *Ogallala: Water for a Dry Land* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); James Earl Sherow, *Watering the Valley: Development along the High Plains Arkansas River, 1870–1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990). See also Anne M. Marvin, "'A Grave-Yard of Hopes': Irrigation and Boosterism in Southwest Kansas, 1880–1890," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Spring 1996): 36–51.

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Studies of farm women on the Great Plains have given some attention to the role of women in farm production, including the development of the Women's Land Army (WLA) during World War II. This photo of a WLA worker was featured on the cover of the September 27, 1943, issue of LIFE magazine.

cleaners, and indoor plumbing before the family purchased electric equipment for the barn and shop.⁴¹

Marilyn Holt also studied farm women in Kansas from 1890 to 1930, focusing on the domestic economy movement. This efficiency drive involved agricultural experts and social reformers who stressed that farm women needed to become more economical, that is, efficient, in their use of time, money, and work. These experts stressed progress in the farm home through better management. Reformers believed that farm women could introduce new agricultural ideas and innovations while maintaining rural traditions if they had the proper training or education. Holt concluded that Kansas farm women selectively accepted reform ideas based on their own needs, and the home economics movement became institutionalized in 4-H, Master Farmer, and Master Homemaker programs and various activities designed to improve rural education, health, and time management.⁴²

The role of the Women's Land Army (WLA) also has received attention. Stephanie Carpenter has provided the most thorough study of the origin, development, and contribution of the WLA in aiding home-front efforts to defeat the enemy during World War II. The WLA created a modest labor force to help farmers during the years when serious farm labor shortages occurred. Although Kansas did not quickly or substantively enlist workers for the Women's Land Army, the membership of which essentially consisted of inexperienced town and city women, the organization played a brief, limited role in the agricultural history of Kansas. The changing role of women on Kansas farms since World War II, particularly during the last quarter of the twentieth century, remains an important area for study, particularly in relation to part-time employment, daily farm operations, and architectural, technological, and managerial changes in the home, fields, and farmyards.⁴³

Since the 1970s the new rural social history has encouraged scholars to consider everyday rural life on farms as well as in small towns. Often they based their work on firsthand experiences. Holly Hope provided a personal reflection of life in Garden City during the late twentieth century. Carol Coburn also published a cogent study of religion, gender, and education in the German community of Block, Kansas, during the late nineteenth and early

41. Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Sandra Schackel, "Ranch and Farm Women in the Contemporary American West," in *The Rural West Since World War II*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 99–118; Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan Flora, "Structure of Agriculture and Women's Culture on the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1988): 195–222; Richard W. Rathge, "Women's Contribution to the Family Farm," *ibid.* 9 (Winter 1989): 36–52.

42. Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies, and the Modern Farm Woman, 1890–1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

43. Stephanie Carpenter, *On the Farm Front: The Women's Land Army in World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Caron Smith, "The Women's Land Army During World War II," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Summer 1991): 82–88; Judith B. Litoff and David C. Smith, "'To the Rescue of the Crops': The Women's Land Army During World War II," *Prologue* 25 (Winter 1993): 347–61.

twentieth centuries. She used a theoretical framework called “networks of association” to inform her work and to discuss the transmission of education and culture across four generations. She wrote: “networks of association are the areas in which to discover how gender, ethnicity, class, region, and religion educate and affect both group and individual behavior.” Key to her study is the interaction between people and their institutions within the context of place and the interdependence of women, men, and children. Her educational networks of association are the church, school, family, and outside world, which she uses to discuss how people formally and informally functioned within a rural–ethnic community. She used the network to assess life in-course, gender differences, and continuities across generations. She also analyzed the influence of technology and culture within a rural community, when the church and school provided the anchors of community life. James Dickenson also has written about rural life in the wheat-farming community of McDonald in northwestern Kansas. His personal account tells the story of the town’s settlement, development, and decay as well as attempts at renewal. These works are important because they depart from the fundamentally economic agricultural and rural histories of the past. No scholar, however, has approached the agricultural and rural history of Kansas by assessing the tensions between community and the marketplace to explain rural life in the manner of Mary Neth. Nor has anyone used the case study method to trace agricultural and rural change in the method of anthropologist Jane Adams or the decline of small towns in the fashion of Richard Davies.⁴⁴

The agricultural and rural history of Kansas remains an important area for historical inquiry. Studies particularly are needed on twentieth-century topics such as migrant farm labor and the ethnic labor force in the meatpacking towns in relation to its political and social influences on rural communities. Additional topics include the changing role of women, environmental problems (especially chemical and livestock pollution and regulations), science (particularly regarding consumer safety), and the effects of the declining farm population on rural towns. The effects of agricultural policy in relation to the roles of the American Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, and commodity groups remain an overlooked area for research. Agribusiness in the form of food processing (including meatpacking), marketing (both domestic and international), and off-the-farm employment as well as the social and cultural ties of farm families to their communities remain little considered by scholars. Tenancy, credit, and mortgages are not fashionable scholarly subjects today, but they merit study to gain a better understanding of the state’s agricultural history. Today social, political, and environmental history remain active subfields for scholars. Overall, the agricultural and rural history of Kansas during the twentieth century, particularly the late twentieth century, remains an open and essentially unexamined field for scholarly inquiry. KH

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44. Holly Hope, *Garden City: Dreams in a Kansas Town* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 4; Carol K. Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1868–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 4, 5; James R. Dickenson, *Home on the Range: A Century on the High Plains* (New York: Scribner, 1995); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Richard O. Davies, *Main Street Blues: The Decline of Small-Town America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998).